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THE SOVIET STRATEGIC MILITARY POSTURE, 1961-1967

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 21 November 1961. Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, the Director of the National Security Agency, and the Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB. The Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of his jurisdiction.

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THE SOVIET STRATEGIC MILITARY POSTURE, 1961–1967

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THE PROBLEM

To reassess the broad outlines of the USSR's military doctrine and posture in the light of recent information on Soviet strategic thinking, present military capabilities, and R&D in major weapon systems, and to estimate future trends in Soviet military strategy and force structure.[1]

THE ESTIMATE

CURRENT TRENDS IN SOVIET MILITARY THOUGHT

Basic Principles

1. Soviet thinking about military policy has proceeded from a general outlook which stresses that historical forces are moving inexorably in the direction of communism. This movement is carried forward by the struggle of "the masses," led by the Communist parties, to overthrow the existing social-economic order, rather than by the direct use of the military power of the Communist Bloc. These beliefs lead the Soviets to view their armed forces as a means to deter Western military action against the Sino-Soviet Bloc, to inhibit the West from intervening militarily in other areas, to maintain security within the Bloc, to lend weight to their political demands and to demonstrate the success and growing power of their cause. At the same time, they wish to have the forces to fight a war effectively should one occur. However, their political outlook, their military programs of recent years, and intelligence on their current intentions, all suggest that the Soviet leaders do not regard general war as desirable or a Western attack on them as probable.

Strategies and Forces

2. Within this general framework, the specific concepts which underlie Soviet decisions about force goals and strategic planning are difficult to discern. These principles can only be deduced, and incompletely at that, from overt Soviet statements, which are carefully framed with an eye to both security and propaganda; from such classified Soviet information as can be obtained; from the choices reflected in the actual military programs undertaken by the

[1] Detailed estimates of the present and future strengths and capabilities of the Soviet and Bloc armed forces can be found in Annexes A and B of NIE 11-4-61, "Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1961-1966," dated 24 August 1961, in NIE 11-8/1-61, "Strength and Deployment of Soviet Long Range Ballistic Missile Forces," dated 21 September 1961, and in NIE 11-2-61, "Soviet Atomic Energy Program," dated 5 October 1961.

It should be noted that the present estimate does not touch on Chinese Communist military developments or possible actions. These might come to affect Soviet military policies and programs during the period under consideration.

USSR; and from the strategic situation which objectively confronts them.

3. It is worth noting that, while the Soviets have made impressive advances in modern weapon systems, a number of factors have hampered the process of integrating these advances into their strategic doctrine. One of these factors is the influence of a long military tradition, strongly reinforced by their experience in World War II, stressing massive movement, protracted campaigns, and the paramount significance of ground combat and the occupation of enemy territory. Another is security barriers within the military establishment, which appear to be far more stringent than in the US. Perhaps the most serious fetter, however, has been the rigid politico-military concepts which Stalin dogmatically imposed upon military thought. It was not until the mid-1950's, for example, that Soviet doctrine began to relax the principle that strategic surprise and the force of the initial blow are relatively unimportant to the outcome of a war between major powers, a position Stalin took in order to divert attention from the USSR's nearly catastrophic unpreparedness at the outset of World War II.

4. The pace of military thought, however, has quickened sharply in the last two or three years, primarily at the initiative of Khrushchev. At about the time when he set in motion a modernization of the Soviet force structure, including a substantial reduction in personnel, the regime began deliberately to encourage controversial discussion among senior officers in an effort to spark original and creative thought. As a result, strategic doctrine is a lively and argumentative field of professional study in the USSR today.

5. Such high-level discourse as we know about does not revolve around the questions of alternative attack strategies and target systems which are at the center of US military attention. Instead, the chief argument ranges "conservative" against "modern" views. Adherents to the first view assert that, despite the advent of new weapons, general war is likely to be protracted, ground combat on a mass scale will continue to be of major importance, and victory will require the combined action of forces of all types, including a multimillion man army. Adherents to the second view charge that their opponents are making only minimal and inadequate adaptations of earlier doctrine to accommodate new weapons. This group argues that a general war is likely to be short, with victory decided primarily in the initial nuclear exchange. Current official doctrine, as it appears in statements by the Minister of Defense, appears to be an amalgam of both these views.

6. The high-level discussions of which we are aware are remarkably deficient in sophisticated analysis of such concepts as first and second strike capability or counterforce strategy. The problems of attacking hardened and mobile strategic forces go completely unmentioned in such information as we have on Soviet targeting for long range attack. While most recommended target lists include nuclear retaliatory forces and control centers, they generally give equal importance to strikes against urban centers and their enemy's broad warmaking potential.

7. We think it certain that the strategic thought which underlies operational planning in the long range striking forces themselves is more sophisticated than this. But we have not acquired detailed Soviet discussions of doctrine for the operations of long range missile and bomber forces. Planning in these forces has certainly been obliged to consider such factors as warning and reaction times and the specific characteristics of different weapon systems and enemy targets. [redacted] indicates that at least some of these factors have been taken into account, but not in ways that suggest very advanced concepts for dealing with the problems involved.

8. On the whole, the information we have suggests that Soviet military thought generally is still preoccupied with the problems of integrating nuclear and missile weapons into general doctrine and is only beginning to cope with the detailed comparative analysis of alternative strategies and force levels. Nor is this preoccupation completely surprising,

since the achievement of an ICBM capability, even in the early stages of its deployment, represents to the Soviets a profound change in their strategic situation. For over a decade, they confronted an opponent who possessed a formidable strategic capability but against whom their own long-range striking capabilities were relatively limited. Now, for the first time, they have a weapon system capable of delivering nuclear attacks against the US with little warning by a means against which there is no present defense.

9. The USSR probably has not elaborated any comprehensive doctrine covering the contingencies of limited and local war between Soviet and Western forces. Public Soviet statements regularly insist that such wars would quickly and inevitably expand into general nuclear war. These statements are clearly intended to deter the West from embarking upon conflict on the Bloc periphery or attempting penetrations of Bloc territory; they are not necessarily to be taken as expressions of Soviet military policy. Confidential sources do not reveal what detailed contingency plans the Soviets have for such a case. We believe, however, that the USSR would wish to avoid direct involvement in limited combat on the Bloc periphery and, if such conflict should occur, would wish to minimize the chances of escalation to general nuclear war. Consequently, it would not in most circumstances take the initiative to expand the scope of such a conflict. Although the degree of Soviet commitment and the actual circumstances of the conflict would determine their decision, we believe that in general the Soviet leaders would expand the scope of the conflict, even at greater risk of escalating to general war, only if a prospective defeat would, in their view, constitute a grave political reverse within the Bloc itself or a major setback to the Soviet world position.

10. Soviet doctrine apparently does not contemplate conflict with Western forces in areas of contention at a distance from Bloc territory. Conflicts involving local anti-Western or Communist forces are treated under the rubric of "national liberation wars." Such forces are credited, on ideological grounds, with the inherent strength to overcome "imperialist" attempts at military intervention. The Soviet support rather vaguely proffered is intended to be of a general deterrent character, but does not envisage overt Soviet military involvement. Despite the Soviet tendency in recent years to adopt an aggressive political stance in conflicts all over the world, the Soviets have not developed the naval forces and other special components which would give them a capability for military operations at great distances from the Bloc.

CURRENT STRATEGIC POSTURE

11. The strategic nuclear force the USSR has developed in recent years could permit the launching of large-scale initial attacks on short notice against a large number of Eurasian targets and a more limited number of North American targets. However, the Soviet leaders cannot at present have any assurance that their own nation and system could escape destruction from retaliatory Western attacks even if the USSR struck first. The Soviet leaders evidently believe their current strategic forces provide a strong deterrent against Western initiation of general war and are sufficient to support a more assertive foreign policy, particularly by virtue of the threat they pose to allies of the US in Europe and Asia. But there is no implication in Soviet behavior that they consider themselves in a position deliberately to attack the West, or to undertake local moves which carried with them a serious risk of bringing on general war. These views do not exclude Soviet use of available strategic attack forces to launch a preemptive blow should they conclude that the West was irrevocably committed to an imminent attack.

12. There have been considerable improvements in the Soviet air defense establishment, primarily through the widespread deployment of surface-to-air missiles at major cities and other key installations. Soviet defenses are now reasonably adequate against medium and high-altitude attack by subsonic Western bombers. We believe that the system as a

whole, however, is far less adequate to cope with sophisticated penetration tactics, low altitude penetrations or supersonic cruise-type missiles. It has no present capability against ballistic missiles. Most important, because of the susceptibility of their defenses to saturation and degradation, the Soviet leaders almost certainly cannot be confident of the degree to which they could cope with the diverse types and scales of attack the West could direct against the Bloc.

13. In addition to forces designed for long-range attack and for defense against such attack, the USSR continues to maintain large theater field forces. The Soviets regard these forces as part of the deterrent to general war, and their military doctrine considers such forces as essential to the conduct of general war should it occur. The Soviet theater forces now in being could institute large-scale attacks in peripheral areas, but the success of such operations in a general war would depend heavily on the outcome of the initial nuclear exchange. The Soviet leaders also regard these forces as a deterrent to any limited action against Bloc territory or on its periphery, serving at the same time as an essential means of maintaining Communist regimes in the Satellites.

14. Based on the current Soviet naval posture and available writings on doctrine, we believe that the mission of the Soviet Navy is to carry out a variety of tasks in a protracted general war, including the support of theater forces in such a war. The USSR has developed some capability to deliver nuclear attacks against land targets, including some in the US, by means of short-range submarine-launched missiles. However, the bulk of the Soviet submarine forces, predominantly torpedo attack types, would engage in interdiction operations in a long war in which the US attempted to maintain extensive logistic support to overseas areas. The Soviet Navy would also conduct defense against hostile naval forces possessing long-range attack capabilities, which the Soviets evidently regard as a major strategic threat. Its capabilities against US missile submarines in the open seas remain severely limited.

Military Research and Development

15. The Soviets are engaged in intensive efforts in weapons research and development to acquire new systems which, by their psychological, political, and military impact, would shift the world relation of forces to their advantage. In making their decisions, Soviet planners will have to consider such problems as rapid technological change, long lead times, developments in opposing forces, and increasing costs of weapon systems. Despite the rapid growth in Soviet economic resources, there will continue to be competition among military requirements as well as with the demands of important nonmilitary programs. Over the last two years, for example, Khrushchev has apparently linked his military arguments for reducing the size of Soviet forces with a further argument that additional funds could in this way be made available for raising living standards. Nevertheless, the USSR is allocating funds generously to military R&D, concentrating major efforts on improving the forces for long range attack and for defense against such attack by the West.

16. Much of the military R&D about which we have recent evidence is designed to fill obvious gaps in the Soviet strategic posture. In the field of long range delivery systems, an intensive program of test firing has been underway to develop second generation ICBM systems, which we believe include missiles of reduced dimensions and lighter weight, more easily deployed than the massive first generation Soviet ICBM. Some of the recent ICBM testing may represent development of systems for delivering warheads with yields on the order of 100 MT. Both a 2,000 n.m. ballistic missile and a supersonic "dash" medium bomber have been developed, and there is some evidence of R&D efforts in follow-on heavy bombers.

17. The principal current Soviet R&D program for strategic air defense, and perhaps the major Soviet military developmental program, is a large-scale effort to achieve defenses against

ballistic missiles. It has been clear to us for more than a year that the Soviets are assigning very substantial resources to this effort. In October 1961, Marshal Malinovsky stated that the USSR had "solved the problem" of intercepting a ballistic missile in flight. From intelligence sources, we believe that the Soviets are making good progress in development work for an antimissile system. This effort has resulted in the acquisition of important data, including data on high altitude nuclear effects, and has also involved the testing of at least some system components. Other known R&D in the air defense field over the recent past has included improved radars for early warning and fighter control, a surface-to-air missile system for use against low-altitude penetrators, and new fighter interceptor systems.

18. Soviet research and development activities also reflect efforts at qualitative improvement in the theater field forces and naval forces. The emphasis has been on mobility and firepower for theater forces, and short and medium-range missiles are now available for their support. Soviet field forces, at least in East Germany, have been allocated surface-to-air missiles for defense against medium and high altitude air attack. Within the next two or three years they will probably also have available missiles for defense against low flying aircraft as well as against ballistic missiles of short ranges. With the advent of US missile submarines, the Soviet Navy has recently placed increased emphasis on new weapons and techniques to extend ASW capabilities to the open seas. We believe, however, that over the next five years, the USSR will have only a limited capability to detect, identify, localize and maintain surveillance on submarines operating in the open seas.

Recent Nuclear Tests

19. The preliminary information now available indicates that the 1961 nuclear test series has given the Soviets increased confidence in current weapon systems, advanced their weapon design significantly, added greatly to their understanding of thermonuclear weapon technology, and contributed vital weapon effects knowledge. Soviet thermonuclear weapon technology in particular appears to be sophisticated and advanced. The 1961 test series will permit the Soviets to fabricate and stockpile, during the next year or so, new weapons of higher yields in the weight classes presently available.

20. Of the 44 shots detected in the 1961 series, 5 to 10 appear to have been proof tests of complete weapon systems, many of them with yields in the megaton range. We believe the Soviets have proof-tested weapon systems of the following types: short or medium range ground-launched ballistic missiles with yields up to about 2 MT and short-range submarine-launched ballistic missiles with yields of about 3 MT. In addition, they have proof-tested bombs with yields up to about 6 MT and have probably delivered more than one such bomb on a single bomber mission. The warheads tested in these various weapon systems are believed to be in stockpile. Those few proof-tested warheads thus far analyzed appear to reflect 1958 technology.

21. Weapon effects tests were apparently conducted underground, underwater, near the surface of the water, and at various altitudes up to 100–200 n.m. Those at very high altitudes will contribute valuable effects information needed for Soviet development of anti-ballistic missile defenses, but were probably not complete systems tests.

22. The majority of the 1961 shots were developmental tests aimed at improving future Soviet nuclear weapons capabilities. Some of the fission weapons tested revealed extensive Soviet efforts to increase efficiency, and to reduce weapon size and weight. Two very large yield tests in this series are particularly significant in that they indicate a high degree of sophistication in weapon design.

a. [ ] Preliminary estimates give

[

] If the actual weight is 10,000 pounds, a 25 MT warhead could be delivered by the first generation Soviet ICBM to a range of about 5,500 n.m.

b. The 58 megaton device probably was actually a 100 MT weapon tested at reduced yield. Used as tested, the device could be of value to a Soviet strategy designed to minimize the fallout from very high-yield weapons. Weapons of this size and weight (probably 20,000–30,000 pounds) could be delivered by aircraft such as the BEAR, or could be emplaced offshore. If the actual weight is 20,000 pounds, such a warhead could be delivered by the first generation Soviet ICBM to a range of about 3,500 n.m. We believe that a more powerful vehicle than the first generation ICBM would probably be required to deliver such a warhead against most targets in the US.

c. A few handmade versions of these very high-yield weapons could be available now or in the near future, but series production would probably require a year or more. However, if they are to be employed as first generation ICBM warheads, we would expect tests of ICBMs with modified dummy nosecones prior to operational deployment.

23. Tests of other thermonuclear weapons, which apparently comprised the bulk of the shots in the recent series, indicate a continuing and highly successful Soviet effort to improve efficiencies, improve yield-to-weight ratios, and reduce fissionable material requirements. These tests show a concentration on weapons with yields between about 1.5 and 5 MT (corresponding to weights between about 1,000 and 3,500 pounds), which are suitable for delivery by all Soviet bombers and offensive missiles. The preliminary analysis indicates that [

] significant progress in thermonuclear weapons design has been achieved.

PROBABLE MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN SOVIET FORCES TO THE MID-1960's

24. Major Soviet concern will continue to focus on the strategic weapons balance. In this area, a critical question is whether or not the Soviet leaders will consider it feasible and desirable to: (a) seek a capability to destroy the US nuclear delivery forces prior to launching, by means of a first strike; (b) seek no more than a capability to deliver nuclear attacks on population and industrial centers; or (c) seek nuclear attack forces of a type and size which will be somewhere between these two concepts.

25. We believe the Soviets already view the first of these concepts as no longer practicable. This is partly because of the thousands of Soviet missiles and launchers that would be required to destroy all the fixed bases of the US nuclear force programed for 1963–1967, especially the hardened US ICBM sites. Equally important, US warning capabilities, fast reaction times, and mobile forces such as airborne bombers and missile submarines already tend to offset Soviet capabilities to attack fixed bases. These latter factors would compound the uncertainties inherent in any Soviet strategy for destroying US nuclear forces prior to launch, regardless of the size of Soviet long-range striking forces.

26. As to a capability to attack cities alone, there is evidence from recent statements and writings that some Soviet military men regard destruction of population and industry, not merely as something to be threatened for purposes of deterrence and intimidation, but also as a major determinant in the outcome of a general war. In view of the weight of nuclear attack the US can launch and the impossibility of achieving a fully effective defense, however, we believe that the Soviet leaders have decided that a capability to destroy only urban and industrial centers, while a powerful deterrent, would be inadequate should general war occur.

27. Consequently, we believe that the Soviets will seek a larger strike capability. This will

probably be one large enough to bring under attack the SAC bomber bases and other soft and semihardened US military installations against which their ICBMs are an efficient weapon system. Further, in determining force goals, they may also wish to provide themselves with an ICBM force large enough to permit them to attack some hardened US targets, and to have a more substantial residual striking capability after a US attack. Although the Soviets would probably not regard a capability on this order as adequate for deliberate initiation of general war, it would put them in a position to strike preemptively at an important segment of the US nuclear delivery forces should they reach a decision that such action was required.

28. Taking these considerations into account, we believe that the USSR will have an ICBM force of several hundred operational launchers in the period 1964–1967. The deployment complexes presently in operation and under construction, while protected by concealment from ground observation, some dispersal, and surface-to-air missiles, are unhardened and vulnerable to overhead observation. In view of Soviet concern for US reconnaissance and attack capabilities, we believe that the Soviets will move to increase the survivability of their ICBM force. In the mid-1960's, the bulk of the force will probably be protected by greater dispersal and possibly by semihardening, and some of the later launchers will probably be fully hardened. More than one missile will probably be available for most launchers.

29. In addition, through 1967, we forecast that the USSR will retain a mix of long range weapon systems. This will include a heavy bomber force which will probably remain relatively small but increase in quality, and an expanding force of missile submarines. Medium bomber strength will probably drop to a few hundred by the mid-1960's, but a considerable portion of these will be supersonic "dash" types, perhaps equipped for standoff missile delivery and for armed reconnaissance. After about the next year, ballistic missile forces other than ICBMs will be characterized by shifts to improved, longer range systems rather than by sheer numerical expansion.

30. In addition to strengthening defenses against manned bombers and cruise-type missiles, we believe that a major Soviet objective of the mid-1960's will be to achieve defenses against long-range ballistic missiles before the US has acquired a comparable capability. In Soviet eyes, this would enable them to claim an important advantage over the US. For political as well as military reasons, the Soviets probably would wish to deploy antimissile defense in at least a few critical areas even if the available system provided only a limited, interim capability. Considering these factors and the present status of the Soviet research and development program, we estimate that in the period 1963–1966 the Soviets will begin at least limited deployment of an antimissile system. Soviet cities will probably have priority for deployment of any AICBM defenses available through 1967. We believe that throughout this period, the Soviets are likely to have only a marginal capability for interference with US satellites.

31. We believe that the Soviet leaders will continue to retain large theater and naval forces. The extent to which these forces are reduced in the next few years will depend in part on the prevailing international situation, but we now believe it may rest equally on the course of the internal Soviet discussion regarding the nature and duration of a large-scale war fought with nuclear weapons. In general, we believe that economic and political factors, together with the further growth of nuclear capabilities, will at some point persuade the Soviet leaders to revert to the military manpower reductions begun in 1960 but suspended in 1961. Ground divisions and tactical air forces will probably be reduced and older ships retired or mothballed, but the USSR will retain sizable forces calculated to be sufficient for all types of warfare, nuclear and conventional, limited and general. Moreover, the Soviets will not abandon the reservist and

mobilization system designed to augment their forces rapidly should the need arise.

32. The recent nuclear test series does not in itself provide clear guidelines as to possible changes in force structure or strategic concepts. We believe that long-range striking forces have been given priority in the allocation of available nuclear materials, and that limitations in the Soviet stockpile have consequently restricted the nuclear capabilities of other forces. The broad range of proof tests, weapon effects tests, and developmental tests in the 1961 series suggests an effort to improve the nuclear capabilities of all arms of the Soviet military establishment. We had anticipated that in any event the limitations on allocation of nuclear weapons to air defense, theater, and naval forces would have eased by the mid-1960's and this trend may be hastened by the recent tests. These forces will then have a greater variety of nuclear weapons at their disposal.

33. It now appears that the trend in nuclear weapon yields of long-range missile and bomber systems will be upwards. The use of higher yield weapons would tend to reduce Soviet numerical requirements for delivery vehicles to accomplish given objectives, although for attacking military targets the accuracy and reliability of the Soviet weapon systems are generally more critical than warhead yield. Warheads in the 25 MT class, which could probably be made available in quantity within a year or so, would enhance the capabilities of the first generation Soviet ICBM against hardened targets. It is reasonable to believe that some of the new ICBMs now under intensive testing are designed to carry warheads of very high yield. Nevertheless, we continue to believe it unlikely that the Soviets would try to acquire the very large number of ICBM launchers needed for effective attack on all the hardened ICBM sites planned by the US. For the present, the very high yield devices are probably intended to support deterrence and psychological warfare, although we have no doubt that military uses are also intended.

POLICY AND STRATEGIES TO THE MID-1960's

34. From the developments likely to occur in Soviet forces, and from implications found in current discussions of military doctrine, we conclude that, over the next five years or so, the Soviets are unlikely to develop a military strategy and posture aimed at the deliberate initiation of general war. They are likely to continue to believe that their policy goals cannot be achieved by this means. Therefore, their first priority, since they evidently do intend to pursue forward policies involving some level of risk, will be to have a credible deterrent against initiation of war by the West. They will recognize that deterrence may fail, and if completely convinced in some situation of high risk that the West was about to launch a general nuclear attack, would attempt to pre-empt. Their strategy for the conduct of general war will probably call for delivering large-scale nuclear blows against Western striking forces and national centers of power, protecting the Soviet homeland against nuclear attack to the extent feasible, and subsequently committing their remaining forces to extended campaigns probably aimed initially at the occupation of Western Europe.

35. The Soviets will want a formidable military posture primarily to prevent such a war, but they will also want it as a support to vigorous policy initiatives short of war. These latter will include in particular the sponsorship of revolutionary activity directed at advancing Communist or pro-Soviet groups to power in any part of the world where the opportunity exists or can be created. It is this sort of struggle below the level of direct military engagement with the major Western Powers which will almost certainly continue to be the Soviets' principal reliance in seeking the expansion of their power.

36. It is conceivable, however, that by the mid-1960's the Soviets will come to regard the deterrence which they can exert upon the West as strong enough to permit them, without excessive risk, to use their own forces in local military actions. They will certainly continue to have field forces on a scale to permit this in areas peripheral to Soviet Bloc

territory, and these will be forces of increased mobility and flexibility. They are also capable of acquiring the naval strength, air transport, and special forces to conduct local military action in more remote areas. On the whole, however, we believe that the Soviets are unlikely to adopt such a course as a matter of general policy, in part because of the risks involved but also because in their view there is likely to be increasing opportunity to advance their cause by nonmilitary means.

37. The use of Soviet forces in local military actions outside the Bloc, if attempted, would be unlikely to take the form of naked military aggression. Instead, any use of Soviet forces outside the Bloc would take the form of support to revolutionary actions by local Communist or pro-Soviet forces, where a pretext could be made that Soviet intervention was intended to forestall intervention by the "imperialists." We believe there is some possibility that such a strategy will emerge by the mid-1960's and will be applied to vulnerable areas bordering on the Soviet Bloc. We think it more likely, however, that the Soviets will continue to rely on local political revolutionary forces, operating without overt Soviet military support but under the protection of an increasing deterrent power, to achieve a more gradual expansion of the area of Soviet control.